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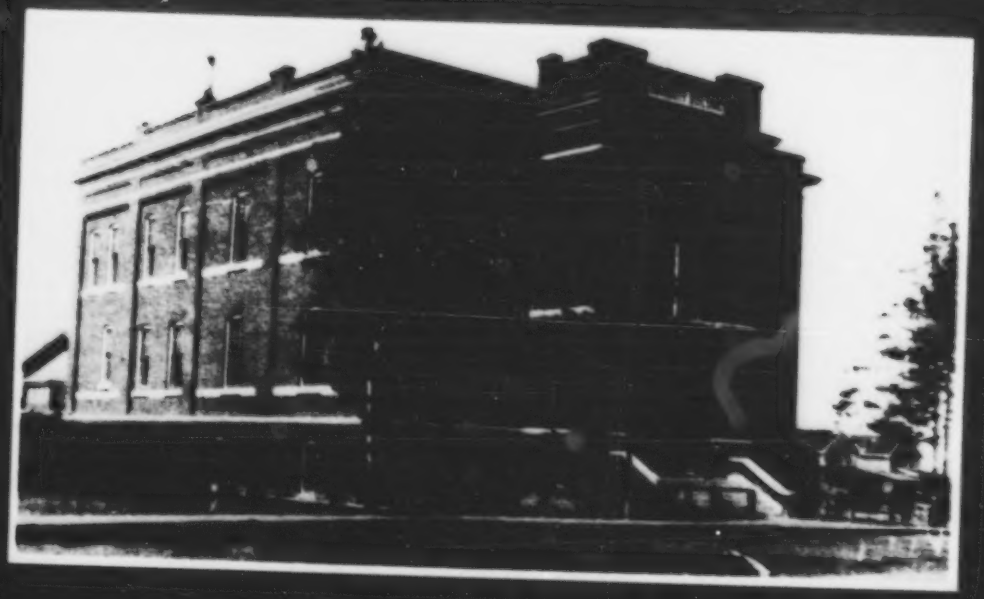
THE PAS COMMUNITY BUILDING AND COURT HOUSE



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Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Recreation

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THE PAS COMMUNITY BUILDING AND COURT HOUSE

The region "north of 53", which was added to Manitoba in 1912, was referred to then as "New Manitoba", yet in many ways this was a restoration rather than an innovation. It reinstated the old fur trade integration of Red River and the north—a connection which, throughout all the years when the north had been a part of the old North West Territories, had never been entirely severed.

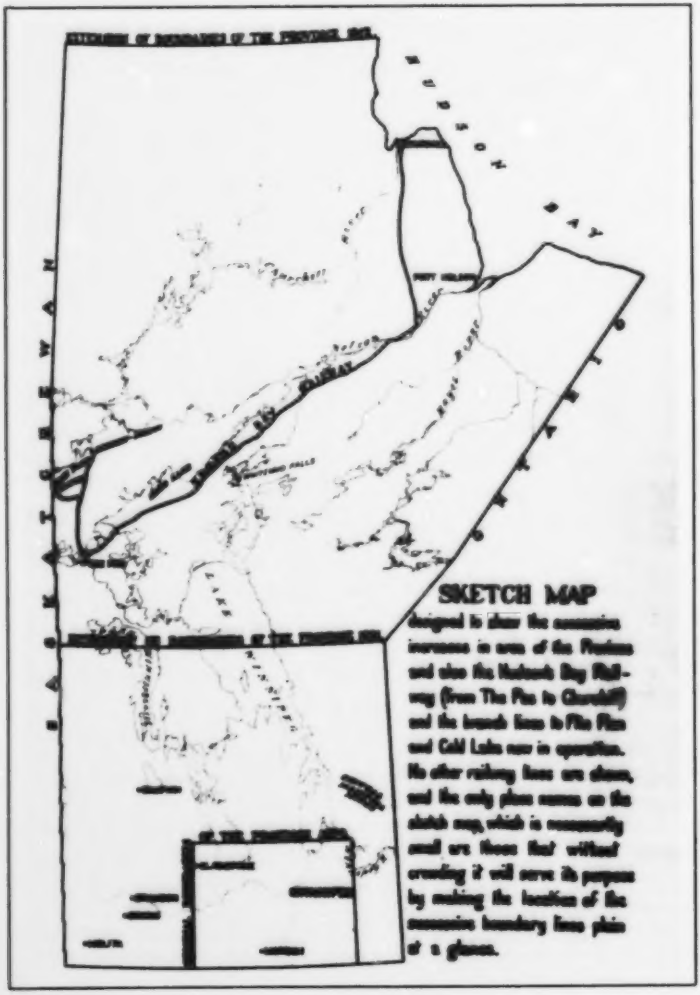
Manitoba made repeated attempts after 1870 to convince the federal government to enlarge its boundaries to conform more adequately to its economic needs, as well as to its history. At first these efforts were concentrated on the western expansion of agricultural settlement, and the boundary extension of 1881 was a partial fulfillment of this design. In 1912, however, Manitoba reached to the north, matching its limits to those of the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan as formed in 1905. This northern extension added to Manitoba a region rich in resources. Fishing, furs and lumber dominated the economy of this area, and it was hoped that valuable minerals would be found there.

The marketing of any of these resources depended on adequate transportation facilities. At the same time as the boundary extension, therefore, the federal government decided to complete the Hudson Bay Railway, to run from The Pas to Hudson Bay, linking southern Manitoba to the new northern resources and maritime frontier. This railway was intended primarily to carry western wheat to Hudson Bay for shipping to world markets, but the very fact of its existence would also open up Manitoba's north for increased settlement and for resource extraction.

From that time to the present, the northern railway proved its worth. The construction of the railway itself brought thousands of workers to northern Manitoba, many of whom stayed on. When the line reached closer to Hudson Bay, it made much of the area more accessible to prospectors, and this led to many valuable ore discoveries. As mines were opened up to exploit these finds, branch lines linked them to the railway and enabled transport of the heavy ores and finished products to market.

The Pas in 1912 was the terminal of an existing railroad and the starting-point for the extension of the Hudson Bay Railway. It was also the centre of the network of waterways which converged at The Pas. This combination of land and water transport made The Pas truly "the gateway to the North", the transportation centre of northern Manitoba, and as a result, its population increased rapidly. These factors made it the natural focus of both federal and provincial government interest and presence. The federal government, in an attempt to improve the vital steamboat connections through The Pas, allocated $50,000 in 1913 to dredge the Pas River and erect a dock, (although this work was not completed until after World War I).

The construction of The Pas Community Building and Court House in 1916-17 symbolized the determination of the Manitoba government to incorporate its northern regions into a smoothly-functioning whole, and in this way to attract investment capital to develop the area. Together with the Central School (1915-16), the first brick building in town, the construction of a brick court house emphasized the permanency of The Pas in this new frontier of Manitoba. But the building was not only an administrative centre for the provincial government; it also became a focus for social and community events, a real Community Building. Through this combination of roles it affirmed an identity which was an integral part of the new, larger Manitoba and yet preserved a singularly northern outlook. The architect, George Nelson Taylor, designed a functional building which furthered these aims.



Boundary extensions of Manitoba, 1870-1912.
Courtesy Manitoba Archives

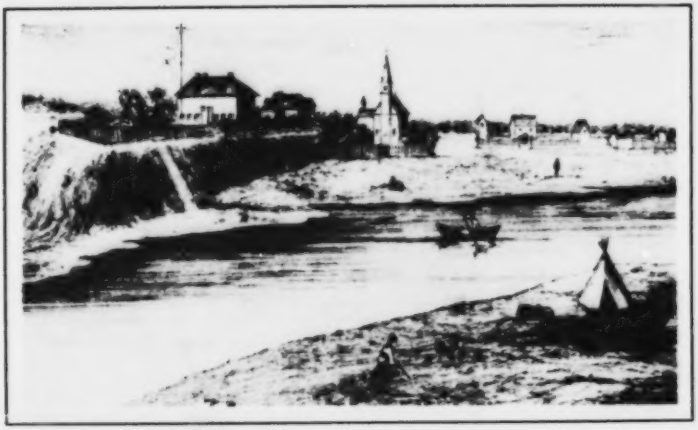
Fishing Centre and Fur Trade Post

The extension of Manitoba and the subsequent building of the Community Building were significant milestones in the evolution of The Pas, but should be considered in the context of a human history which extended back for centuries. The Cree had fished and hunted at the junction of the Saskatchewan and Pasquia (The Pas) Rivers long before it became known to the French or British fur traders. When Henry Kelsey of the Hudson's Bay Company, the first European to venture so far, was led inland in 1690 by Cree, he passed near this well-used fishing site, if not actually to it.

In the 18th century, when fur traders from both Hudson Bay and New France reached **Basquia** or **Paskoyac** (or variations of these spellings), they noted it as a spot where they could be sure to meet Cree and trade furs with them. Louis-Joseph La Verendrye, "the Chevalier", founded a trading post, Fort Paskoyac, in 1750, on the right bank of the Saskatchewan River just below the Pasquia River. Such French posts, situated on the river routes leading to York Factory, severely eroded the trade of the HBC, because the natives preferred to trade with these convenient inland posts rather than undertake the long and arduous journey to the Bay. Fortunately for the HBC, the Seven Year's War and the Cession of New France in 1763 put an end to these French posts in the western interior and restored its former monopoly of trade.

Within a few short years, however, the competition from Montreal, now in British hands, was fiercer than ever. Individual "pedlars", mostly Scots merchants who had moved to Montreal after the Cession, hired French-Canadian voyageurs to lead them through the western waterways to establish fur trade posts in opposition to the HBC, often on the sites of such former French posts as Fort Paskoyac. As these rival fur traders proliferated throughout the west, they presented a more formidable obstacle to the Company trade than the French had ever done.

Basquia, then a favourite rendezvous for the Cree, was a natural attraction for these traders, and as early as 1768 the pedlar James Finlay had an outpost there. The relations between the traders and the Cree of Basquia were not always amicable, however. On occasions the Cree forced the traders passing through to pay a toll. Unpopular traders, such as the pedlar William Bruce, who occupied a post at **Basquia** in 1773, were forced to move. As different traders came and went over the years, the Cree used this fur trade rivalry to obtain the maximum return on their furs.

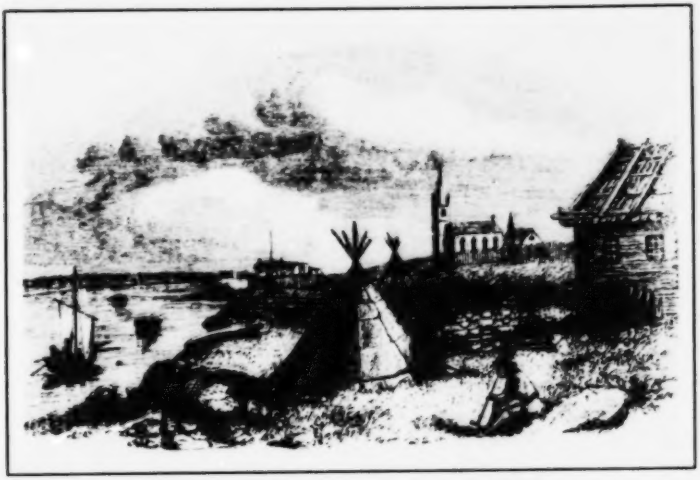


Fort Definace, now part of The Pas, as it appeared in 1877.
Courtesy Foote Collection, Manitoba Archives

In 1774 the HBC decided to move inland, and ordered Samuel Hearne to eastablish a post in the region of **Basquia**. On the advice of his Indian guides, however, Hearne selected Cumberland Lake as the site of his post, because three different nations—the Pasquia/Carrot River Indians, those from the Sturgeon River area, and the western Grass River Indians—could be contacted there, rather than the single group who frequented **Basquia**. The Basquia Cree soon travelled regularly to Cumberland to trade, especially after the North West Company abandoned its post at **Basquia** in favour of one at Cumberland in opposition to the HBC. It was to be 1856 before the HBC established a trading post, Fort Defiance, at The Pas, motivated then by the 19th century influx of free-traders into the region.

Until the North West Company amalgamated with the HBC in 1821, the Cree of Basquia continued to hunt and trap furs, and act as canoemen and guides for the competing fur traders. They were able to juxtapose these various economic opportunities with their strategic position on the Saskatchewan River to maintain a strong and independent position within the fur trade system, until they were decimated by the dreadful smallpox epidemic of 1782-83 which swept through the northern plains and forest. By 1800 the population structure at **Basquia** changed, as many freemen (discharged voyageurs) of the North West Company, among them Joseph Constant, settled there with their mixed-blood families. These freemen competed with the remaining Cree for wage labour opportunities from the rival companies, as well as in the fur trade itself. This rivalry became even more complex in 1801 when the North West Company brought in some 50 Mohawks to trap in the region.

This period of intense competition and over-trapping led to the disappearance of beaver and by the 1820s the trade at Cumberland was composed largely of muskrats. The Pas Moraine, the only rising ground between Grand Rapids and Cumberland, was surrounded by swamps which were good breeding grounds for muskrats, and therefore offered ideal conditions for trapping and trading these furs. But this did not provide an adequate basis for subsistence, especially when the amalgamation of the North West Company with the HBC in 1821 deprived the people of their ability to play off one fur trade company against the other. Fearing that the freemen of The Pas might themselves engage in competitive trade against the HBC, Governor George Simpson tried to force them to move away in 1822. He relented a few months later, however, after Joseph Constant convinced him that the freemen would not interfere with the HBC trade. The Pas remained a settlement where both mixed-blood and native peoples lived and gradually coalesced into one group. Soon the Cree at **Basquia** began to plant gardens to supplement their declining hunt.

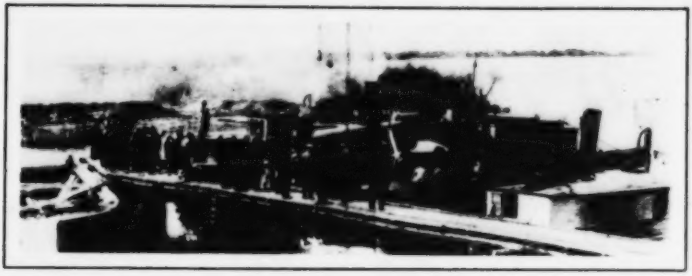


Devon Anglican Mission, The Pas, as seen c. 1857-58.
Courtesy Manitoba Archives

Mission at The Pas

In 1840 the Church Missionary Society sent Henry Budd, a native catechist, to begin a school at The Pas. This was the first extension of the Anglican Church beyond Red River, an important milestone in its expansion. Budd was replaced by an ordained minister, James Hunter, in 1844; together they laid the basis for this successful mission, with its church and school. The influence of the mission contributed to a gradual increase in the number of Cree living near it. By 1862 the Cree occupied log houses for part of the year, grew potatoes and barley, worked on the HBC York boats, and hunted and fished, thus combining aspects of their traditional life with new economic and religious demands. In 1881 the Cree population at The Pas was 707, making it one of the largest of the northern settlements.

The Catholic Church had made an effort to establish a mission station at The Pas in 1843-44 but this had not been maintained. In the 1870s Père Bonald and other Oblate priests made mission visits; Père Ovide Charlebois built the first Roman Catholic chapel in 1897. The presence of this mission helped attract the French-speaking settlers of the early 20th century to Le Pas, (as it was known to them). In 1910 Charlebois was named Vicar Apostolic of Keewatin, and chose Le Pas as his diocesan headquarters.



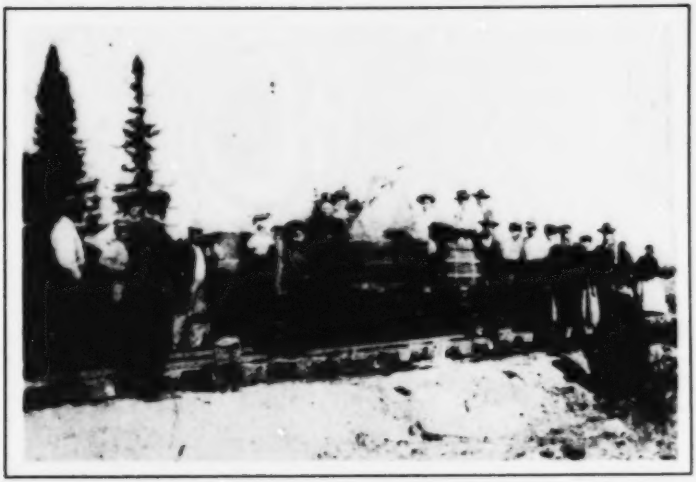
Steamboats leaving The Pas for the North, 1912.
Courtesy Manitoba Archives

Water Transport

As steamboats began to ply the Saskatchewan in the 1870s The Pas assumed a new role as a stopover and fuelling spot. Although the large Mississippi-style riverboats disappeared by the 1890s, supplanted by railroads, The Pas continued to be the centre of much of the local water transport of the northern area. In 1896 this role was recognized when it was chosen to be a post office, named Le Pas. The continuing importance of this site on the main water routes drew non-native families to live there and diversify the economy.

Railway Centre

The completion in 1908 of a Canadian Northern Railway link between Hudson Bay Junction, Saskatchewan, on the main line, and Le Pas (or, in alternate use, The Pas), which officially opened in 1911, added a new dimension as a transportation centre. Herman Finger established The Finger Lumber Company, and rafted logs down the Carrot River to his sawmill. The sawn lumber was sent to market by railroad; Finger thus combined the old and new methods of transport and accessibility to resources.

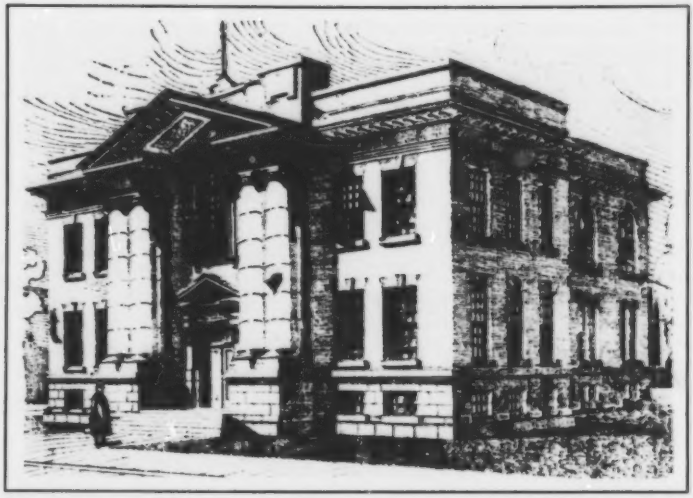


Inauguration of railway passenger service from The Pas, 22 May 1908.
Courtesy Manitoba Archives

The Hudson Bay Railway was to run from The Pas to either Port Nelson or Churchill. All supplies and labour for the building of the railway would pass through The Pas, the end-of-rail, and, as the railway progressed, The Pas would remain an important junction. To make room for this expansion, the Indian Reserve was relocated across the river from the town.

When The Pas was included within the "New Manitoba" of 1912, Herman Finger took the lead in incorporating it as a town, named The Pas, and became the first mayor. The town then had a population of about 1500 but, because work on the Hudson Bay Railway resumed at the same time, its role became even more important to the nation and the province. It was the centre of population, transportation and distribution throughout the new north of Manitoba and nearby northeastern Saskatchewan.

The new transportation possibilities offered by the railroad through The Pas, added to the water routes which linked it to new northern mines, lumbering regions and fur trade areas, made the town a logical centre for a government administrative presence in the north. In recognition of this, the Manitoba government appointed J.A. Campbell in 1916 as the Commissioner of Northern Manitoba, to look after northern affairs from The Pas. The previous year, The Pas had become the centre for the judiciary of the district. The building of a court house followed as a natural consequence on this.



Proposed Court House at The Pas, as envisioned by V.W. Horwood in 1914. In this perspective view, it is clear that the massing of this proposal was similar to the present building designed by Taylor.
Courtesy Legislative Library of Manitoba

The Community Building and Court House

The construction of the Court House was the culmination of a long sequence of changes which led to the formation of the modern community of The Pas. To the roles of fishing site and fur trade centre were added those of nexus for modern methods of transport and harvesting of new resources. The Pas Community Building and Court House would serve as the centre for administration of this vast "new north" of Manitoba, while at the same time acting as a point of coalescence for the variety of people who made The Pas their home.

As early as 1913 the Provincial Architect, Victor W. Horwood, had prepared the plans for a two-storey brick court house, 22.25 m (73 ft.) by 24.69 m (81 ft.), with stone dressings. The proposed structure was to be in the Classical Revival style, similar, although smaller and less ornate, to the Winnipeg Law Courts (1912-16) and the court houses at Brandon (1908) and Minnedosa (1909). The 'T'-shaped The Pas court house featured a spacious central entranceway, flanked by four large Ionic columns. Both the colonnade and the entranceway were crowned by broken-based triangular pediments. The windows featured radiating voussoir lintels. A prominent bracketed cornice marked the roof-line.

Horwood's building was never constructed. In part, this was due to the recession which followed the 1896-1912 boom. The principal reason, however, was the Legislative Building scandal in 1915, with its repercussions on the Department of Public Works. All planning and construction of new government works was halted while the case was considered. When a Royal Commission substantiated charges of corruption, Premier R. Roblin submitted the resignation of his government. Provincial Architect Horwood, who had committed perjury in an attempt to conceal the original misdoings, was unceremoniously removed from his position following Roblin's fall. The Department of Public Works was drastically remodelled and the position of Provincial Architect was abolished.

The proposed court house in The Pas was only one victim of the general cost-cutting policy adopted by the new Liberal administration of T.C. Norris. Initially the Minister of Public Works, Edward Brown, suggested that the government build only the basement and first storey; the second storey could be added if the municipality paid for it through the rental of floor space. This proposal, coupled with the province's refusal to pay a Dominion government subsidy to the town, created much local dissatisfaction. Brown, the member for The Pas, was publicly reminded of his party's pre-election promise to erect a substantial court house. Within a few days plans were announced for the construction of a three-storey public building, at a cost of $50,000. Furthermore, Brown assured the local press, the town would not be expected to contribute a penny.

The new building was to be representative of the administration's philosophy. It was to be a functional, multi-purpose building, housing not only the court, but also the jail, the office of the Commissioner of Northern Manitoba, municipal offices, a game warden's office, a land registry office, and an assembly hall. George Nelson Taylor, an architect in The Pas who had designed the town's first brick building, the Central School (1915-16), was selected to draw up plans for a court house on a site on the corner of Fischer Street and Third Avenue. Construction began in September, 1916, and The Pas Community Building and Court House as officially opened on 13 November 1917, by the Honourable Edward Brown.

Central School, The Pas, Manitoba, 1915-16. George Nelson Taylor, architect. Demolished. This was the first brick building in the thriving Northern community.

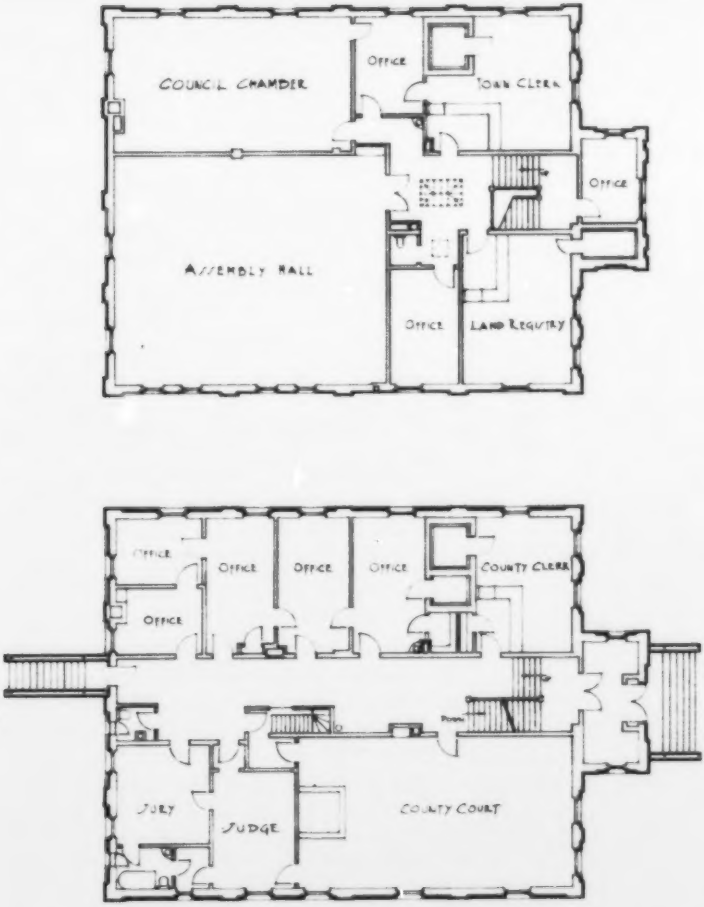
Courtesy John A. Campbell Collection, Manitoba Archives

The Community Building designed by Taylor was a substantial edifice. As such, it successfully emphasized the stability and reinforced the administrative importance of the town. The massive bulk, high basement, and central entrance were retained from the old design, while the Classical features—the columns and pediments, the voussoirs and the cornice—were abandoned. The front wing featured brick pilasters ending in individual corbels, and retained elements of the pediment which had been present in Horwood's design.

The Community Building exemplified the new simplification of architectural design and detailing in public buildings in North America. Although the starkness of the exterior was partly due to a reduced construction budget, it was also a consequence of the reaction to Classically-detailed buildings, with their sometimes overabundance of ornamentation. The Pas' new building demonstrated its self-controlled modernism quite well. The red brick of the walls served as an excellent background for highlighting the clean linear qualities of the white limestone components. During the 1920's, 'stripped classicism'' would become quite popular for new structures. It was indeed a classicism purged of ornament, thus creating a more modern-looking building than the one originally envisioned.

Community Building, Fischer Avenue, The Pas, Manitoba, 1916-17. George Nelson Taylor, architect. Taken in November 1917, this is one of the earliest known photographs of the new court house.
Courtesy Legislative Library of Manitoba

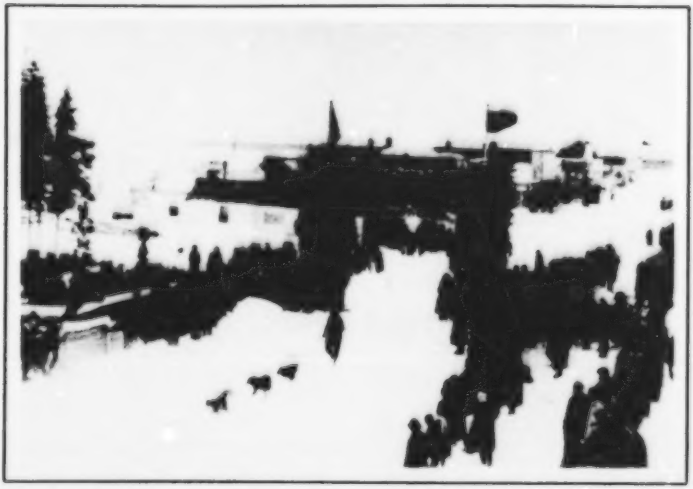
The lay-out of the building illustrated its many functions. A vestibule provided entrance to a hall on the ground floor, with stairways to the basement and second floor straight ahead. The basement contained the steam heating plant, the janitor's quarters, and the 14-cell jail. On the ground floor, to the right of the entrance, were the offices of the bailiff and constable, rooms for the Commissioner of Northern Manitoba, and the law library and barristers' room. On the opposite side of the corridor were the county court room, and rooms for the judge, the jury and the sheriff. The placement of the court was unusual; most Manitoba court houses were located on the second floor, because the court function was a primary use which had precedence and importance above all other uses. At The Pas, the court was clearly reduced to a secondary function, while the assembly hall above assumed an overwhelming importance in the structure. This made the Community Building unique among Manitoba court structures. On the top floor were the Town Clerk's office, the Mayor's office, the Council Chamber, the Town Engineer's office, the Land Registry office, and an assembly hall 10.6 m (35 ft.) by 11.6 m (36 ft.), which had a hard maple floor to accommodate dancing. The interior decorations included a slash grain fir trim, stained and varnished; the corridors and rooms were burlapped to a height of 1.1 m (3 ft. 6 in.).



Floor Plans of the Community Building, The Pas, as the lay-out existed c. 1930. Illustrated are the top floor with its assembly hall, as well as the main level which held the court room.

The Pas Dog Derby Queen candidates on the front steps of the Community building, 1922.
Courtesy Ethel Barker, née Coan

The Community Building immediately emerged as a centre of social activity in the town; it complemented the church halls, on the one hand, and the hotels and billiard rooms on the other. At the inaugural event, sponsored by the Independent Order of Daughters of the Empire, 200 couples danced until 3:30 a.m. in the assembly hall, which had been "tastefully decorated" for the occasion. The IODE continued to make good use of the building. One of their most popular events was "a Little Casino", which included a cabaret, a wheel of fortune, clairvoyants, and fortune-tellers. Town meetings were held there, and local store-owners closed their shops to attend and participate in discussions. The building was also frequently used for public lectures; in 1918 Private F.C. MacDonald, a recently-escaped Prisoner of War, captivated his audience with a "graphic description of conditions back of the lines and in German prison camps". The building was also home for many of the numerous social and sports clubs which began to form in the town, such as The Pas Curling Club and the town baseball team.

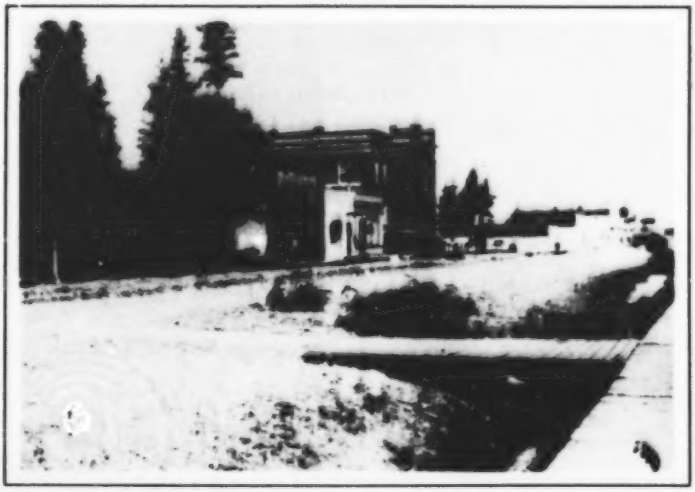


The Pas Dog Derby of 1919, as photographed by John Tyrrell Coan from a point across from the Community Building. The location of the podium at the left indicates the central nature of this structure.
Courtesy Ethel Barker, née Coan

No event better symbolized the determination of the pioneers in The Pas to maintain their northern identity than did the annual Hudson Bay Dog Derby, (later The Pas Dog Derby), inaugurated in 1916. It was, as the editor of *The Pas Herald and Mining News* commented, "An institution of the northland, peculiar to the conditions and life of the country." The race, it was hoped, would also attract the interest of soldiers, returning from the war in Europe, who might wish to settle in the region. The dog derby, held in March, also included a winter fair, selection of a Queen and Princesses, sports, exhibits sponsored by the Board of Trade, and dances organized by the IODE. There were baby shows, snowshoe races, a bonspiel, and teas. It was, in short, a celebration of life in the north. At the heart of this celebration stood the Community Building: the races began on its steps, and its halls and rooms hosted the various events and performances. The local paper could hardly conceal its delight at the success of the 1919 race, and the attendant activities:

> The Pas is transformed. It is hardly recognizable. [In the] streets where formerly a few gathered, are personalities of Northland life, from the miner and fur trapper to the Indian from Puckatawagan [sic] to Lac du Brochette.

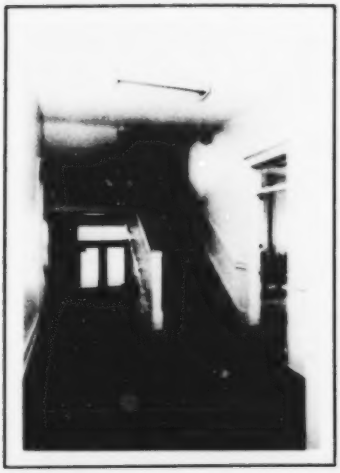
Also in attendance, and symbolic of The Pas' incorporation within the wider Manitoba community, was the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir James Aikens.



Fischer Avenue, The Pas, 1919.
Courtesy Ethel Barker, née Coan

Significance

It is significant that both of the two original brick buildings in The Pas were built by the provincial government. During its early boom, when the town was made up largely of tents, shacks, or frame structures, the construction of these buildings emphasized the government's commitment to the region. Substantial brick buildings such as Central School and the Community Building attested to the permanency of this frontier community in much the same manner as brick buildings had in the past demonstrated the stable nature of prairie communities in southern Manitoba. In general, the more brick buildings acquired by a town, the more visible was its permanency and economic importance. Few towns changed their locations once the heavy masonry building arrived.



Main hallway and stairs, Community Building, The Pas.
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Library, Community Building, The Pas.
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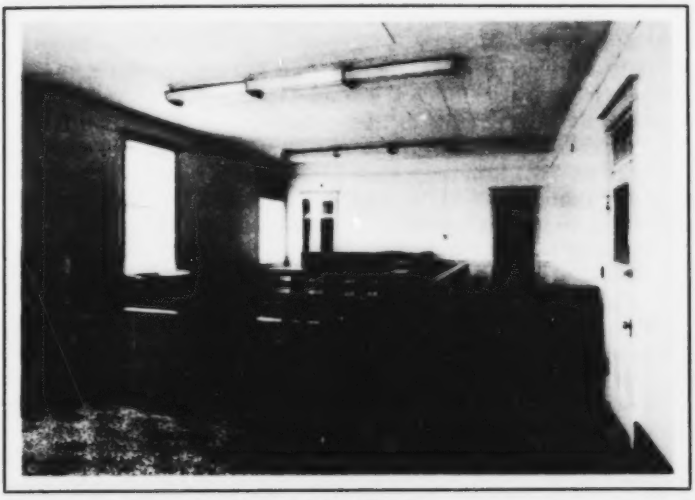

Court room, Community Building, The Pas.
Historic Resources Branch

The Manitoba Government's determination to develop the north was responsible for the construction of the Community Building. In marking the stability of the town, the government reaffirmed past decisions of other public bodies to construct the Hudson Bay Railway, or to conduct geological surveys for mineral wealth in the area. Sir Wilfrid Laurier claimed that the 20th century belonged to Canada, and succeeding governments offered much incentive to private enterprise to develop the north, in an attempt to fulfil a consideration which appeared to transcend all political and economic ties. But local initiative was an important factor in the decision to construct the Community Building. As Edward Wood stated at the inaugural dance: the government "had observed the determination of the pioneers of Manitoba's Northland, its great resources, and the immense possibilities before it."

The functionalism of the Community Building and Court House, reflected in its name, aided the emergence of a cohesive community in The Pas. The building provided the frontier with a permanent administrative centre to maintain order and promote growth, which served at the same time as a social and leisure facility for many of the people.

In 1982, the court facilities were moved to a new building and the Community Building was vacated. With strong support by The Pas Historical Society, the Town Council and concerned citizens, the building was declared a provincial heritage site the following year. Discussions were undertaken between the Town, local groups and Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Recreation concerning possible new community uses for the building. In 1987, the Province transferred the building to the Town and provided a grant to assist the restoration work. The main tenant will be the Sam Waller Little Northern Museum, which evolved from Sam Waller's personal teaching collection, accumulated over his thirty-six years in lay missionary work among Northern reserves. The collection is eclectic, representing local, natural and human history, as well as curiosities from all over the world. Sam bequeathed the collection to the Town in 1978. This reuse ensured that Northern Manitoba's oldest standing brick structure most definitely remains a community building.

Suggestions for Further Reading

The early development of Northern Manitoba is covered in A.S. Morton, *A History of the Canadian West* (London: Nelson, 1939.); more specifically related to The Pas area is K. Pettipas, *The Diary of the Reverend Henry Budd, 1870-75.* Volume IV, Manitoba Record Society Publications. (Winnipeg: Hignell Printing Limited, 1974.), as well as the excellent local history, *The Pas, Gateway to Northern Manitoba* (The Pas: Historical Society, 1983.). There is, of course, Paul Thistle's *Indian-European Trade Relations in the Lower Saskatchewan River Region to 1840.* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1986.). Lastly, for an account of court house development in Manitoba, see R.R. Rostecki, *The Early Court Houses of Manitoba.* Manuscript Report No. 285, (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1977.).

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Mrs. Ethel Barker, who provided a number of the early photographs of The Pas. These were taken by her father, John Tyrrell Coan, one of the early photographers in the district.

Credits

Cover photograph is courtesy of the Manitoba Archives, John A. Campbell Collection, no. 172-1. It depicts the Community Building as it appeared around 1925.